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RUEHDJ/AMEMBASSY DJIBOUTI 2781
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RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 1129
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [UNSC](#) [KPKO](#) [MARR](#) [ER](#) [ET](#)
SUBJECT: DON'T MESS WITH UNMEE'S MANDATE: CHANGES
UNACCEPTABLE TO THE GSE

CLASSIFIED BY: AMB Scott H. DeLisi, for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

REFTEL: ASMARA 392

¶1. (C) In Asmara, both UNMEE officials and the GSE are sending clear messages that changing UNMEE from a peacekeeping to an observer mission will not be accepted. At the monthly Friends of UNMEE meeting on May 23, Acting SRSG Ennifar and the Force Commander Major General Mohamad Taisir relayed that neither the Eritreans nor Ethiopians would consent to changing UNMEE. On May 22, in separate meetings with Poloff, two GSE officials, MFA Director General for UN Affairs Ghirmai Ghebremariam and Colonel Zacarias Ogbagaber, Commissioner for the UN Peacekeeping Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea expressed indirectly (and in typical Eritrean style) the GSE's unwillingness to accept transformation of UNMEE to an observer mission.

¶2. (C) Both Ennifar and Taisir asserted that the current mandate should not be changed and that an observer mission is unacceptable to either the Eritreans or the Ethiopians. Furthermore, Taisir affirmed that a minimum of 2,200 UNMEE personnel is required to support monitoring and demarcation. If, and only if, UNMEE's mandate were to change to an observer mission, would 1500 be a minimum staffing pattern.

¶3. (C) In meeting with Poloff on May 22, Zacarias emphatically stated that the GSE agreed to a peacekeeping mission, not an observer mission nor a peacemonitoring mission. He further explained that from the GSE perspective such a change or reduction of size would indicate to the GSE that the UN planned to "abandon Eritrea" and "admit to failure". Changing UNMEE to an observer mission, would show the GSE that the international community and UN members no longer cared about Eritrea, the border or even regional stability and implied that the GSE would not accept such a change. He passed on that UNMEE staff in Asmara told him demarcation was impossible with the proposed size of 1500.

¶4. (C) While taking a slightly different tact and refusing to comment specifically on the GSE's position on UNMEE size and composition, Ghirmai echoed Zacarias' statement

regarding the failure of the UN. Pleading his lack of involvement with UNMEE, although he is the Director General for UN Affairs, Ghirmai nonetheless did indicate that if the Security Council wished to change the configuration that was its prerogative, however the failure to demarcate the border would be that of the UN and not of the GSE.

15. (C) Comment: As reported in Reftel, the winds have shifted. Eritrea's previously professed disinterest in UNMEE's staffing seems disingenuous given the comments of Ghirmai and Zacarias. The GSE appears to be interpreting a reduction of UNMEE to 1500 as an indicator of lack of support or interest in demarcation; a further affront to Eritrea and evidence of how the no one cares about Eritrea. By taking this approach the GSE again focuses the responsibility of demarcation on the UN and international community and the GSE continues to use UNMEE as a card to be played in the process. A strategic move, the GSE continues to try to place themselves on the moral high ground, yet, despite this, it appears that maintaining the current UNMEE mandate is critical to keeping the efforts toward demarcation on track. End Comment.

DeLisi